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ABSTRACT

The New Brunswick (Canada) Comprehensive Reading/Language Arts Plan (NBCRP) is an integrative framework of goals not only for a developmental reading/language arts program but also for the special students regardless of classification. The NBCRP proposes three major categories of action: (1) the institution and improvement of a reading/language arts curriculum for grades one through twelve based upon the structure of five critical experiences--sustained silent reading of self-selected books, composing (oral and written), reading aloud to students, responding to literature (heard, read, visualized, or dramatized), and investigating and mastering basic skills; (2) the institution and improvement of effective curriculum related tests for placement, diagnosis and measurement of progress; and (3) the institution and improvement of informal measures of the students' growth in interaction (talking together) skills, writing skills, study skills, and positive attitudes toward reading. (HOD)

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THE NEW BRUNSWICK COMPREHENSIVE READING/

LANGUAGE ARTS PLAN (NBCRP)

Implementing and Evaluating

The Five Critical Experiences of Reading/Language Arts

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GOALS AND GUIDELINES

Most teachers share two basic and interacting goals for reading/language arts instruction:

1. to advance competence in reading and listening and in oral and written expression
2. to nurture positive attitudes toward reading and the effective use of language

The New Brunswick Comprehensive Reading/Language Arts Plan (NBCRP) proposes an integrative framework of goals and processes for advancing these goals.

The NBCRP is a framework for action, not a prescription. Its main foundations rest upon significant research but its implementation is flexible and responsive to any reading program in any given school.

The NBCRP relates to every person, preschool through adult level, to every content area of the curriculum and to all the communicative arts and skills.

The NBCRP embraces not only the developmental student, but also the exceptional student -- whether "remedial" and "corrective", the "slow learner", the "educationally disadvantaged", the "learning disabled", the "gifted" or the "functionally illiterate adult".

The N.B.C.R.P. is a plan of shared accountability. The administration provides exposure to and endorsement of N.B.C.R.P. and assists in the implementation of the plan through provision of materials, inservice programs and general support. The staff brings its collective energies and wisdom to

implementing, evaluating and improving the program.

The objectives are set forth in the NBCRP as "action plans". The research reported herein strongly supports the idea that efficient and creative implementation of these action plans will produce optimal growth in reading achievement and positive attitudes.

The NBCRP proposes three major categories of action.

1. The institution and improvement of a grade 1-12 reading/language arts curriculum based upon the structure of the five critical experiences (those experiences necessary for the optimal development of the communication skills) in reading/language arts:

- Sustained Silent Reading of Self Selected Books
- Composing: Oral and Written
- Reading Aloud to the Students
- Responding to Literature (heard, read, visualized, or dramatized)
- Investigating and Mastering Basic Skills

2. The institution and improvement of effective curriculum - related tests for placement, diagnosis and measurement of progress.

3. The institution and improvement of informal measures of the student's growth in interaction (talking together) skills, writing skills, study skills and positive attitudes toward reading.

THE NBCRP ACTION PLANS

Implementing the Five "Critical" Experiences in Reading/Language Arts.

Critical Experience 1: Self-Selected and Sustained Silent Reading.

Self-Selected and Sustained Silent Reading means that students will be able to choose from a wide assortment of books and periodicals and read them in school without interruption, at their own pace and in their own way.

It is not surprising that having students read on their own is not only a major objective of reading, it is a way of becoming a more effective, efficient and versatile reader. It is an excellent form of practice and drill. It is also a way of encouraging a lifetime commitment to reading as a means to knowledge and entertainment. (6, 9, 26, 27, 30, 34, 42, 43, 44, 45, 51, 67.)

This critical experience, "Sustained Silent Reading," (SSR) was proposed by Lyman Hunt (34) for elementary classrooms and Daniel Fader (27) for secondary classrooms. The process is a simple one: each student selects a book; everyone reads, including the teacher; at the end of SSR, students or the teacher should volunteer to share something from their reading. There should be no pressure on the student to respond. It should be kept in mind that the goal of responding should be a sharing of experiences to promote motivation (this is not the time to evaluate.)

Start with a period of three to five minutes at the early primary levels and build up gradually to fifteen to thirty minutes as students show they can handle it. In middle grades and secondary schools, twenty minutes a day appears to be

manageable.

Actions Required for the Implementation of Critical Experience 1

1) Immediately begin daily SSR periods providing wide choice of material. Grade one children can read pictures in books and "read" story books. Secondary teachers should begin regular sustained silent reading periods related to units of study in their disciplines as a means for broadening the intellectual reach of their students.

2) Administration personnel might occasionally visit classrooms to participate in SSR sessions and show by their model the significance of this experience.

3) Increase the number of books, periodicals, and paperbacks in classroom libraries. Expect to replace unreturned and disintegrating paperbacks.

4) Invite students to loan or give books from their personal libraries to the classroom collections or to exchange books.

5) Provide a means for circulating classroom collections through cooperation with the school library. Develop less strict regulations for circulating these books.

6) Plan an annual book fair, book auction, and book swaps.

7) Create a small on-going bookstore, especially in secondary schools.

8) Develop criteria for various grade levels for "sharing" experiences.

Critical Experience 2: Composing (oral and written)

Learning to read from composing:

Composing, as a means for learning to read, has great value. (1, 2, 15, 25.) There is a strong advocacy for having children dictate their own words, sentences and stories which are then recorded by the teacher and read back by the children. (1, 2, 44.)

As early as the preschool level, children are interested in writing the letters and copying their dictated words and sentences. (15.) When children see their own oral expressions recorded, they are more likely to develop understanding of the connection between oral sentences and written sentences. Fernald (28) used, with remarkable success, a variation of this composing approach to learning to read with severely handicapped older readers.

Sustained Writing (SW)

It is recommended that all elementary (beginning at grade 1) and secondary students write something each day in response to their reading, their experiences, or in exercise of their fantasies. They might keep these writings in a journal,

copybook or folder. Often, students may find a notebook page overwhelming; notebooks can be cut in half, horizontally.

The objective of SW is to foster the habit of writing by providing a daily period of uninterrupted writing time. In SW students choose topics to write about. These products should not be graded since grading is likely to impede the writing flow of students, and grading is likely to discourage teachers because of the time involved. Although the teacher does not mark these compositions, s/he may gain the opportunity to read some of them and make constructive and supportive comments.

The value of SW is that it gives students needed practice in writing. It also models a practice of accomplished writers in that to get started, they often sit and let ideas flow without worrying about editing or prestructuring. Daily writing can be instituted through the establishment of periods of sustained writing which parallels Sustained Silent Reading.

Establishing SW Involves 6 Steps

1. Have students keep a notebook to serve as the journal for SW. They might make their own books with a personally designed cover. Entries should be dated.

2. Some students may experience difficulty with the flow of writing during the initial stages of SW. Teachers should develop and have at their disposal a "bank of ideas" for the stimulation of writing (a single word, an uncompleted

sentence, personal topics, recording the day's events, something that touches the student from literature, etc.) If necessary, an idea can be presented to those students requiring assistance. One way for some students to get started, regardless of age, is to copy a favorite passage from a book and perhaps, to illustrate it.

3. Since the teacher writes too, arrangements or directions must provide for the student's desire to spell correctly. At the primary levels, a list of words on the board, a personal file box with word cards, words on cards pinned on the wall, or copying alleviate the need to ask for help at the primary levels. An available dictionary will aid older students.

4. The first sessions of SW should have a 2 to 3 minute time limit. Gradually increase the time as you see the students are able to write for longer periods.

5. Provide time for voluntary oral sharing. The teacher may begin by telling what s/he has written. A student may wish to have the teacher read his/her journal but not wish to read it aloud. A place should be provided where the student can deposit the journal so that the teacher can then read it at a later time. Students may share orally with a partner.

6. As stated above, there is no grading of this writing. The teacher should respond to the content only. All comments should be of an encouraging positive nature.

GUIDED STRUCTURED WRITING

In addition to SW, students at every level benefit from specific teaching of the conventions and techniques of writing (usage, punctuation, capitalization and spelling) and from specific opportunities to write a variety of writing assignments (stories, poems, letters, outlines, reports, reviews, messages, etc.)

In order to stimulate written composition and model the conventions and techniques of writing, the teacher guides the whole class in writing activities. Through instruction, children should be made aware of sense of purpose (instruction, persuasion, entertainment, etc.), sense of audience (consideration for the reader), and sense of occasion (formal or informal).

Following teacher modeling of composing with the whole class, children can learn much from each other by writing in small groups. The ultimate aim is to lead children to the point at which they independently work on writing projects of their own choosing.

Masterpiece writing is the end result of guided structured writing. Often this is achieved only after several draft writings have been closely edited by the student and peers acting as proofreaders, and by the teacher and student.

The mechanics of writing (usage, punctuation, capitalization, spelling) should be considered an integral part of guided structured writing. An examination of student writing

yields a wealth of information. Areas of difficulty can be diagnosed and students can be task grouped in accordance with their individual needs.

Actions Required for the Implementation of Critical Experience 2

1. Provide daily sustained writing periods for students.

2. Encourage the writing and informal publication of student articles and books. See that these works are included in the classroom and school libraries.

3. Develop seminars and workshops with journalists, editors and writers who live in the community.

4. Stimulate the development of a writers' club within and outside the school day.

5. Provide inservice opportunities for teachers in order that they become aware of new techniques for stimulating and evaluating writing experience. (11, 23, 24, 39, 44, 50.)

Critical Experience 3: Reading Aloud to Students

Before school and before systematic instruction begins, the earliest means by which the youngest child learns to read is by listening to and responding to literature at home. A literate environment at home usually produces children who read early and who maintain their competence throughout school. (20, 21, 22, 35, 36, 40, 44, 60.) A literate environment has several characteristics: family members have a general commitment to the benefits and pleasures of oral and written language; there is a home "library"; there are writing materials; family members read, read aloud to their

children and to one another, and talk about what they read.

It is a common belief that no factor is more important than the influence of the home. Therefore, it becomes evident that any effort to improve language arts instruction should include a parent component. Parents of students should be influenced to provide a literate environment.

The school also must provide a literate environment for the student. Teachers must read aloud to children everyday. Even when students are capable of reading literature on their own, they should continue to experience literature read aloud.

The benefits of reading aloud to students are numerous. It sparks their imaginations, provides images and ideas for children to write about, enriches their language, provides a good model for language, develops concepts, social attitudes, knowledge and thinking abilities, provides training for the habit of sustained attention, develops a love and appreciation for books and good literature, establishes a mutual bond among listeners and increases their reading skills. (3, 4, 5, 9, 17, 18, 19, 29, 35, 41, 47, 52, 65.)

Hearing literature read clearly transcends both grade level and subject matter. All parents and teachers can contribute to advancing the understanding and enjoyment of literature and therefore, according to research, to reading achievement and positive attitudes toward reading and language.

Actions Required for the Implementation of Critical Experience 3

1. Encourage and train parents to read to their children daily and to engage their children in oral language responses beginning at the earliest possible age (6 months to 1 year is not too young) and continuing throughout their school careers.

2. Set guidelines for preschool and elementary teachers to read to their students daily from a wide variety of appropriate prose and poetry.

3. Set guidelines for secondary teachers to read to students regularly, literary selections related to their units of study.

4. Administration personnel might occasionally visit classrooms and read to students. (This is meant to be a symbolic rather than routine practice).

5. Arrange for inservice programs which will increase the understanding and significance of this critical experience.

6. Reference lists of appropriate books to be read to children should be provided.

Critical Experience 4: Responding to Literature

Responding to oral and written literature means that students will hear, read, or see enacted a literary selection and will be encouraged to respond to it personally through discussion, written expression, simulations (role-playing, informal dramatizations, etc.), and through the other expressive arts.

Response to hearing or reading "literature"

from primary levels through secondary schools should be elicited from students from all four cognitive perspectives as indicated in the chart below. Encouraging responses from the engagement/involvement perspective is desirable because that is the natural, first response to most people to literature (7, 10, 38, 53, 54.)

Comprehension Perspectives of Literature

PLAIN LANGUAGE	COMPREHENSION LABELS USED BY READING AND ENGLISH SPECIALISTS
1. What are my personal reactions/feelings?	engagement-involvement (personal response-creative thinking)
2. What does it say? (characters, setting actions)	literal (factual, recall, recognition, stated meaning, observational)
3. What does it mean?	inferential (interpretation, beyond the information given)
4. How appealing and worthy is it?	evaluative (critical)

Engagement-involvement is a term used by Purves (54) meaning a personal reaction to literature in relation to the fictional world of the work, the author, the moral standards of the work/author and the artistic form of the work.

Literal, Inferential and Evaluative are terms used by Barrett (63).

Literal. Literal comprehension requires the recognition or recall of ideas, information, and happenings that are explicitly stated in the materials read.

Inferential. Inferential comprehension is demonstrated by the student when he uses a synthesis of the literal content of a selection, his personal knowledge, his intuition and his imagination as a basis for conjectures of hypotheses.

Evaluative. Evaluative Comprehension is demonstrated by a student when he makes judgments about the content of a reading selection by comparing it with external criteria, i.e. information provided by a teacher and/or authorities and/or an accredited written source on the subject; or with internal criteria, i.e. the reader's experiences, knowledge or values related to the subject under consideration.

Any experience, whether in books or in life, can be viewed, thought about, and talked about from all four perspectives. To do so, is to stimulate and develop thinking.

Research shows that elementary and secondary teachers seem to overuse questions that call for factual answers rather than those that generate discussion and involvement. (32, 48.) Unfortunately, teachers seem to be encouraged in this biased emphasis by the suggestions in many teachers' guides of basal reading and literature programs. (57, 56.) One result of this may be to discourage and dampen student interest and involvement and thereby to limit the flow and

quality of thought.

There are a variety of productive activities to tap all of the four comprehension perspectives. The best of these activities often involve the interaction of several or all perspectives.

- discussions, debates, dialogues
- compositions (oral and written)
- oral and choral readings and rereadings
- simulations (role-playing performances, informal dramatizations)
- question/answer formats
- retelling (including retelling by changing characters, actions, or setting)
- art and music interpretations

Response to hearing or reading poetry should also begin at a personal or engagement-involvement level. By working on an interpretation of a piece of poetry students can express their personal reaction to it.

One of many appropriate responses to poetry, involving all perspectives, would be to "do a poem." Poetry can be interpreted to bring out the rhythm and the musical use of speech sounds. Pantomime or dance can add visual and movement dimensions to the interpretation. Students may write additional verses to a poem or poems.

The significance of hearing, reading and responding to literature for the bilingual/bicultural student is worthy of note. A rich diet, both qualitatively and quantitatively, of the exceptional language in literature provides such

students with the solid base in oral language necessary for competency in reading and writing. (3, 17, 29, 65.)

To summarize, teachers must learn to give balanced emphasis to all four comprehension perspectives in encouraging and eliciting student response to narrative and poetic literature, beginning with personal responses.

Actions Required for the Implementation of Critical Experience 4

1. Arrange for inservice programs which will increase understanding of this critical experience.
2. Encourage teachers to elicit responses to literary experiences from all four comprehension perspectives: engagement-involvement, literal, inferential and evaluative.
3. Develop model lessons for implementing Critical Experience 4.

Critical Experience 5: Investigating and Mastering Basic Skills

Basal readers and other teaching resources at the elementary school level and study skills texts at the secondary level present activities to develop the mastery of basic skills. To obtain optimal results from these resources, attention must be given to the following:

1. Students should be placed at their appropriate instructional levels in basal readers and other skill development materials.
2. Problem-solving approaches in the study of sound, structure and meaning should be introduced.
3. Reading/Study Skills.

1. Instructional Level Placement

Placement of students at their proper instructional level in a basal series has been found to improve the achievement, motivation, and study skills of students, particularly the slower readers who are easily frustrated by materials too

difficult to read and comprehend.

2. Investigations in the Study of Sound, Structure and Meanings

Research indicates that we obtain higher achievement in reading when there is a strong component of instruction in meaningful decoding and encoding at the level of syllables, words and sentences. (14.) Two methods of learning to decode and encode meaningfully are associative learning and problem-solving investigations.

Associative learning means learning from being told and from practice and drill. Associative learning is very important and begins in the first years of the child's life. At all ages, much is remembered and memorized as a result of associative learning.

An investigation (insofar as the study of language is concerned) is a search for pattern. Students are presented with data and are asked to investigate the data to see what patterns they can find and what conclusions can be drawn from their findings. An investigation calls upon earlier associative learning. Investigation techniques and methods for problem solving can be used interchangeably.

If students are asked to work in small heterogenous groups on such problems their interaction, thinking and study skills (33, 46) are enhanced by the collaborative effort. Many understandings about the structure of English and meanings in language are brought into awareness as children are involved in such investigations.

3. Reading/Study Skills in Content Areas

Reading/Study skills in the content areas means the growing ability to handle a variety of materials effectively and independently. Learning to respond to textual reading requires continuous guided experiences in identifying, reading and remembering the key vocabulary, main ideas, details, and sequences of main ideas and details. This is best handled by guiding students in the search for structure and meaning.

For this search, the SQ3R unified study procedure is recommended. (56.) SQ3R represents the steps in independent study of textbook-type materials.

S - previewing the text (making use of summaries and other organizational aids; making preliminary outlines.)

Q - turning headings into questions

R - reading to answer the questions and making notes

R - recite - pausing to relate the answer to the question

R - review

As early as fourth grade and through the college level, students should be guided and drilled through these routines of study as the means of grasping the content of the subject matter. While students will become increasingly self directing in using these routines for independent or peer group study, it cannot be assumed at any grade level that students know how to use this study procedure independently. The teaching of this key reading/study strategy, as it pertains to a certain subject, is the responsibility of each teacher at every grade level.

SQ3R focuses on literal comprehension almost exclusively. In the use of every textbook, teachers should approach the content from the other comprehension perspectives, also. This can be accomplished by eliciting responses through a wide variety of activities, including:

- discussions
- compositions
- simulations (role-playing and other informal dramatizations)
- debates
- visual interpretations

There are other reading/study skills involved in learning the content subjects.

1. organizing a notebook to take notes from listening and reading
2. writing reports
3. solving word problems (mathematics and science)
4. reading scientific articles and lab reports
5. following directions in specific manuals (industrial arts)

These reading/study skills cannot be taken for granted at any level. They cannot be learned incidentally by most intermediate, junior high and secondary students any more than the decoding skills can be learned incidentally by most younger students. Teachers at every grade level need to "walk" students through SQ3R and other reading and study skills that lead to effective mastery of the content.

Actions required for the Implementation of Critical Experience 5

1. Develop a system whereby students are placed in basal readers, or other scaled reading skills programs at their instructional level through the use of curriculum-related tests.
2. Set guidelines for providing students with a balance of systematic problem-solving and associative-learning experiences to make use of sound, syntax and meaning in learning to read and spell.
3. Set guidelines for having teachers take responsibility for providing alternative learning experiences for students who cannot read their books such as
   - more careful pre-reading preparation for reading assign-

ments

- a choice of books to provide for differences in reading ability, interests and needs
- opportunities to experience the ideas in other ways (filmstrips, visits and 'hands on' experiences, lectures, hearing the content read aloud by an able reader, etc.)

4. Set guidelines for having elementary and secondary teachers take responsibility for helping students learn the vocabulary and study skills needed to understand their subject.
5. Arrange inservice programs to increase understanding of this critical experience and methods for its implementation.

Balancing the Five Critical Experiences

N.B.C.R.P. calls for a balance of the five experiences in learning to read which are supported by research. It is not a question of choosing the best one. Each experience contributes to the larger goals of high achievement and high interest. Each is an avenue for learning not only reading but also the other language arts: writing, listening and talking together.

Developing and Using Curriculum-Related Tests

Both curriculum-related tests (criterion-referenced) and standardized tests (norm-referenced) play important but different roles in assessing student competence in reading. Together they can provide the basis for managing the placement, diagnosis and progress of students in Critical Experience 5. While such measures are useful in management, diagnostic teaching, remains the teacher's most valuable assessment tool.

Curriculm-related tests for placing children at their instructional level

Comprehension and decoding constitute the reading skills to be measured. Mastery of these skills is judged by the achievement of a certain minimum score. Such information serves teachers well because it indicates how students might be grouped for instruction (placed at an appropriate instructional level rather than one that is too hard or too easy) and is diagnostic and provides the basis for judging mastery and pacing through the program.

Comprehension

Research indicates that general comprehension (having students respond to word sentence and paragraph meanings) can be measured reliably, but that separate comprehension perspectives (distinct subskills of comprehension) cannot be reliably tested.

If we are unable to measure distinct subskills of comprehension, it should be noted that the comprehension responses (engagement-involvement, literal, inferential, and critical) are for teaching not for testing.

General comprehension measures are likely to be the most reliable and efficient estimates of the thinking processes in reading. The assumption is made that if students can accomplish tasks of a general comprehension nature, the subskills have been mastered.

Decoding:

Traditionally, basal readers have chosen their core

vocabularies on the basis of frequency of use rather than on the basis of regularities in spellings. More recently basal readers (example: Reading 360 program) have made increased use of syllable/spelling pattern research in developing their programs. Basal reader series today typically present some combination of high-frequency sight words and syllable/spelling patterns, and their variants (noun, verb, adjective, adverb forms.) Weaving them together is one of the functions of the instructional program within the NBCRP.

We need to measure the ability of a student to recognize and decode a sampling of the sight words and syllable/spelling patterns introduced at each level of the basal reading program through fourth year. At that level all the important word processing skills have been introduced. An efficient and manageable CRT of the decoding processes should measure the mastery of these major spelling patterns and high frequency vocabulary taught at each basal reader level. This can be done through word recognition tests in isolation and in context.

To summarize, a management system for placing, diagnosing and advancing students through a scaled program in reading need only include two simple subtests at each level through fourth grade level books.

1. a measure of general comprehension and
2. a measure of word recognition.

Mastery of these objectives constitutes evidence that the other subskills are known.

Actions Required for the Implementation of Curriculum-Related Testing Program:

1. Develop or obtain cost effective and reliable CRTs for placement, diagnosis, and monitoring of students within your structured reading program.
2. Arrange inservice programs to increase understanding of the nature, values and uses of these instruments.

Informal Appraisals of Student Competence and Attitude

If the NBCRP has been implemented successfully, we can expect higher performance on curriculum-related tests in addition to the following observable behaviours

1. an increase in the numbers of books students read and an increase in the amount of pleasure they get from them;
2. an increase in the quantity of students' written expression, and an increase in the quality of their written expression including both control of written Standard English and competence in written communication of ideas;
3. an increase in the use of study skills in independent work and in collaboration with peers, and
4. an increase in the quantity and quality of verbal interaction.

In Summary

The introduction asserted that the NBCRP was an integrative framework not only for a developmental reading/language arts program but also for the special students regardless of classification.

Which student does not need:

1. to respond to oral and written language from a variety of perspectives: engagement-involvement, literal, inferential and critical?

2. to select books and read them in sustained periods of silent reading?

3. to compose, orally and in writing, his or her own thoughts?

4. to use more recognition and decoding strategies?

5. to work at his or her instructional level in scaled skill development materials?

6. to learn to read through problem-solving as well as associative-learning activities?

7. to learn to study and respond to textual materials and to become increasingly independent in study?

Providing these experiences for the educationally-different does not require a different comprehensive plan, but rather a different implementation plan with consideration for the special student's level of cognitive functioning, attentiveness, pacing and motivation.

The insight offered in the NBCRP is that a <u>needs assessment</u> could properly begin with the questions:

1. How well does our program provide all our students with the five critical reading/ communication arts experiences?

2. Are we diagnosing and placing students in basal-type materials with efficient reliable curriculum-related tests?

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